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ABSTRACT

"Teaching in the Future Tense" is an approach to education which develops student initiative and responsibility, the ability to work cooperatively, experience in democratic decision-making, and the ability to envision and work toward alternative futures. It is firmly based on the "experimentalist" philosophy of education, as distinct from the mainstream "essentialist" philosophy. The paper describes how a small group of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educators and interested citizens in Spokane, Washington have worked together over the past two years to create a vision of what the future of education in their community could be. It contrasts their philosophical beliefs with more traditional approaches to schooling, provides vignettes of their classroom work, and describes the kinds of in-service work they have identified for learning how to "teach in the future tense." (Author)

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TEACHING IN THE FUTURE TENSE

BY

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TEACHING IN THE FUTURE TENSE

INTRODUCTION:

"Teaching in the Future Tense" is a cooperative project involving elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educators in Spokane, Washington. The first section of this paper will give a brief overview of who we are, how we got started, and what we mean by "teaching in the future tense." The second section will discuss how our work differs in theory and in practice from more traditional approaches to classroom teaching and learning. The third section will discuss the kinds of in-service work that we want for ourselves and for others who want to learn to "teach in the future tense."

Participants at the "Teaching in the Future Tense" presentation at the 1987 NCSIE Conference received a copy of the booklet we have produced. This booklet includes an Introduction to "Teaching in the Future Tense," a philosophical rationale, and examples of how we strive to put our ideas into practice in our classrooms. Additional copies of this booklet are available for $3.00 from the writer or from FutureSpokane Education Committee; East 525 Mission; Spokane WA 99202; phone (509) 484-2145.

PART 1: WHO WE ARE, HOW WE GOT STARTED, and WHAT WE MEAN BY "TEACHING IN THE FUTURE TENSE"

We are a small group of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary teachers and interested citizens of Spokane,

Washington. We have met together monthly for the past two years to talk about what we like and don't like about schooling and about what we do in our classrooms. The impetus for our work was a conference in the fall of 1985 sponsored by "FutureSpokane," a volunteer organization of Spokane area citizens who are concerned about the future of their community. One part of that conference dealt with education and was intended to provide a vision of what education might be like in the future of our community. At the conference, we learned about "super learning" or "accelerated learning" -- the ability of the human mind to absorb information at rates far in excess of what we had imagined possible. The message was that we can and indeed must find ways to help students learn more, faster.

A few of us at the conference, while in no way denying the importance and fascination of what we had heard, felt that simply learning more, faster, was not an adequate vision of what education might become. We believed that education in the future should place greater emphasis on helping students become self-motivated learners and decision-makers, able to learn independently as well as cooperatively, able to envision potential or alternative futures and to work effectively toward them. We believed that "more of the same," regardless how stepped up the pace, was not the wave of the future.

We formed a committee under the auspices of FutureSpokane, and we began a series of meetings in which we refined our vision for education. We called our project "Teaching in the Future Tense," and agreed on these four elements.

1. Individual initiative and responsibility.

We envision classrooms in which students take initiative and act responsibly. We assume that students learn to be self-starters by having experience in self-starting, and to be responsible by being given opportunities to act responsibly.

We disagree with teachers who run their classrooms with such a tight rein that students need only be obedient and compliant. Too many schools and classrooms emphasize the virtues of the good factory worker: obedience, punctuality, attention to detail, and a tolerance for tedium and boredom. Such virtues reflect the needs of a society in the throes of an industrial revolution, not the needs of a post-industrial society such as will exist in twenty-first century America. We believe that the virtues of the students of the future will be the ability to exercise initiative, to take increasing control of their own education, and to act responsibly.

2. Building Community

We envision classrooms in which students know each other, care for each other, and learn cooperatively with each other. We place high value on the development of social competence in children and adolescents, and believe that when teachers take time to help build a sense of community in their classes, students learn more and enjoy learning more.

We disagree with educators who structure their classes and their lessons so that students mostly compete with each other. We believe that our nation's greatness and wealth is more a product of our ability to cooperate than to go-it-alone or to best one's neighbor. Pioneers cooperating in a house raising is

a better symbol of our nation's success than the lone hero riding off into the sunset.

3. Democratic Decision-making and Shared Power

We envision classrooms in which students have ever-increasing opportunities to make decisions about what takes place in their classes and how. We envision classrooms which reflect our country's democratic ideals. We recognize that teachers must help students learn to exercise political power thoughtfully and wisely. We firmly believe that the way to build this in students is by sharing decision-making power.

We disagree with teachers who govern their classrooms autocratically on the arguments (1) that children and adolescents are not able to make decisions democratically, or (2) that there isn't enough time to conduct such lessons. We believe that the way to learn to share power and to become competent citizens of a democracy is to practice making collective decisions--both democratic and consensual--within clearly defined parameters. And we believe that such lessons may be the most important lessons which we can give our students in schools.

4. Investigative community

We envision classrooms in which students are engaged in speculative, analytical, and creative thinking. We place a higher value on the ability to ask intelligent questions than to provide correct answers. We want students who can thoughtfully challenge tradition, who have an intolerance of dogmatism, who can speculate about alternative ways of doing things, and who develop the ability to create visions of personal futures and to

hypothesize about what-might-be on the basis of what-has-been.

We disagree with teachers who claim that there is no time in the school day or subject curriculum to conduct inquiry-style lessons and who defend the need to "cover the curriculum" at all costs. We know from experience and research that content learned in such fashion is quickly forgotten whereas content learned as part of an investigative process is more apt to be retained and transferred to new situations. We note with irony that the most popular game of the '80s is "Trivial Pursuit"; we want our classrooms to go beyond the pursuit of trivia.

PART 2: THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASE OF "TEACHING IN THE FUTURE TENSE"

At Eastern Washington University, I teach a graduate course entitled "Philosophy and Organization of the American School." Most of the students in this course are teachers doing a "fifth year" of study required for permanent certification in Washington State. In this course four different philosophies of education are studied: (a) essentialism, the mainstream philosophy which provides the underpinning for most of what goes on in our schools and for most of the in-service programs for teachers; (b) experimentalism, which derives from the work of John Dewey and which is the philosophical basis for "teaching in the future tense"; (c) existentialism, which places ultimate importance and priority on the development of the individual and is a protest against the dehumanizing and depersonalizing aspect of so much of current pedagogical practice; and (d) perennialism, which is reflected in the *Paideia* writings of Mortimer Adler and is a

protest against the mindlessness and anti-intellectual bias of so much of public schooling.

As a device for helping the students in this course analyze their own educational beliefs, I developed a do-it-yourself "Educational Beliefs Inventory" -- still very much in the drawing board stages of development -- which has them consider their beliefs in five areas: the goals of education and how schools can best meet those goals, how people learn best, the nature of the ideal student-teacher relationship, and how best to manage classrooms. The Inventory consists of statements which reflect the four traditional educational philosophies: essentialism, experimentalism, existentialism, and perennialism.

Herewith are the items from the Inventory which reflect "essentialism" in the left column, and "experimentalism" -- the philosophical basis for "Teaching in the Future Tense" -- in the right hand column.

1. In preparing children and adolescents for happy and productive lives as adults the *most important thing* is:

to ensure they learn the basics--the prescribed school subjects.	to have them learn how to learn from their experi ences and how to solve problems cooperatively.

2. In order to accomplish this purpose, the content of the curriculum should:

be selected and prescribed by the teachers, school, state, or some other edu- cational authority.	consist of socially rele vant topics of educational power which emerge from the interests and concerns of

teachers and students.

3. The goals of schooling are best met by:

having controlled learning environments in which students know exactly what is expected of them and what they have to do.

using cooperative learning ventures in which students solve problems with their peers democratically.

4. People learn best:

when what they learn has been selected, organized, and delivered by a well-prepared professional.

by reflecting on their experiences and by relating their experiences to those of others.

5. The ideal student-teacher relationship is:

a leader-follower relationship in which the teacher exercises authority and the students are expected to comply.

one of shared power, in which decisions and agreements about classroom life are reached democratically or by consensus.

6. In discipline or classroom management, it is best to:

have the teacher be the authority in control of the class, and have uniform and consistent rules and punishments.

have students participate democratically in setting and controlling class routines, and to problem solve with groups of students as necessary.

7. When I look into a classroom and see children talking with each other, and ten minutes later, they're still talking with

each other, the first thought that comes to mind is:

there's a lot of time being wasted here, and the teacher probably needs "time-on-task" inservicing.	there's a lot of student-to-student cooperative learning going on here, and it's probably a productive use of time.

[Note: I have omitted from this paper the responses which would reflect a preference for existentialism and perennialism.]

The Inventory is designed to help educators begin to understand how their own thinking reflects or differs from mainstream essentialism. Look at your responses to the above items. If you found that you had a fairly steady preference for the statements on the left, then you fit into the mainstream, essentialist philosophy. You probably find yourself agreeing with criticisms of American education which have come from the U.S. Department of Education (viz: *A Nation At Risk* and *What Works*) or with the College Board's Green Book. If you found yourself preferring the statements on the right, then you probably see yourself as an innovator and are more concerned with developing community than with "covering the curriculum." You may have enjoyed Postman and Weingartner's classic *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* as well as William Glasser's *Control Theory in the Classroom* or *Schools Without Failure*.

Being slotted to one side or the other does not mean that you have been philosophically boxed and thereby limited. It simply means that you have a philosophical preference. Knowing that preference will help you think about and respond to the ideas of other educational innovators. For instance, in her presentation

at the NCSIE Conference, Carol Langbort of San Francisco State University described her work with teachers in the San Francisco Math Leadership Project, and how she has helped them replace "myths" about Math education with attitudes necessary for helping kids build confidence in their mathematics abilities.

MYTHS	CONFIDENCE BUILDING
only one answer	many right answers
only one approach	many approaches
no guessing	guess, estimate, and test
speed is better	time to think
must work alone	working in groups

The pedagogue in me nodded in agreement. The philosopher in me noted that her right hand column--"confidence building"--reflected the thinking of the experimentalists and of "teaching in the future tense," and that what she had labelled "myths" were mostly aspects of essentialist philosophy, and not myths at all to one of that persuasion.

To summarize to this point, "Teaching in the Future Tense" is based on the experimentalist view of education. It stands in contrast to the mainstream "essentialist" view of schooling, and the contrast can be shown as follows.

Traditional	Teaching in the Future Tense
A traditional and predictable world	A drastically changing world
Teacher centered	Teacher-student collaboration
Autocratic	Democratic
Prescribed curriculum of	Emerging curriculum of the

the expected and known	unexpected and unknown
Serious	Fun
Isolated	Linkages
Impersonal	Involving
Something to "take" (and be done with)	Life-long learning
Three R's:	Three R's:
Reading	Responsibility
'Riting	Reasoning
'Rithmetic	Relating

One member of the "Teaching in the Future Tense" committee, Joel Harding, is an English teacher at Mead High School, Mead Washington, as well as a member of the FutureSpokane Board of Directors. Joel was asked by a citizen of Spokane at one of the FutureSpokane meetings about our work. The questioner was particularly concerned with our emphasis on democratic structures and with sharing decision-making power with students. He asked where there was room in our approach for the autocratic teacher. Joel's response was that our approach is one that values democratic structures. If a teacher wants to be an autocrat, then that's fine; let him or her go ahead and be an autocrat. But our approach is simply different. Not necessarily better or worse; just different. We happen to be philosophically committed to it, and we think it is the wave of the future. Nonetheless, we want to acknowledge and to celebrate our differences, and we want to make sure that educators at all levels know that there is indeed more than one way to skin the educational cat.

PART 3: HOW TO "TEACH IN THE FUTURE TENSE."

Some teachers in my education philosophy classes are quite happy in their traditional essentialism. And they are fortunate, since most of the in-service that is available to teachers comes out of the essentialist tradition: Madeline Hunter's *Improved Instruction* and Rita Dunn's learning styles, as examples.

Other teachers who are attracted to the ideas of "Teaching in the Future Tense" want to know if and how it works in the primary grades. We are fortunate in having in the "Teaching in the Future Tense" group a first grade teacher, Jeanne Kertes, who runs a very democratic and student-centered classroom. Jeanne's kids come to school (Robert Reid Elementary School in Cheney, Washington) at 8:20, and immediately set to work on their "learning choices." She has worked with them to identify the learning tasks they have to accomplish in handwriting, arithmetic, etc., and the kids set to work, making their choices as to what they want to do first. The result is a beehive of activity, with twenty or more different things going on. Yet it is all very highly structured and organized. And if a student comes to her and says, in effect, "what should I do," her response is to help the child identify a learning choice and to go do it. At 8:50, the kids clean up whatever mess has accumulated, and have a short full-group lesson which is followed by reading groups until recess. After recess, more learning choices until lunch, and again the class is a beehive of diverse activities. To the untrained eye, it looks somewhat chaotic. But what the observer gradually notices is that the students are

busy, they are helping each other, they know where the materials are and how to use them, and they seldom interrupt Jeanne when she is working with an individual or group of students. The kids are learning and enjoying it.

High school teachers also want to know how to develop democratic structures in their classrooms. Again, we are fortunate in having Larry Bernbaum, a high school English teacher at Central Valley High School in Spokane, on our committee. Larry spends the first week of school having the students in his classes develop the rules and norms they want for the class. Having done this for a few years, Larry knows pretty much what rules the students will come up with. But he also knows that the process of having the students develop their own rules--and different classes might have slightly different ones--is crucial for engendering a sense of student "ownership" of the way the classroom works. Yes, this process takes time at the start of the year, but it pays dividends as the year progresses and the class develops a sense of community. Larry illustrates just how well one of his classes developed a sense of its own power by describing what happened the day he slept in and was half an hour late. The students had checked his plan book, identified the task for the day, gotten to work, taken attendance, and marked him absent!

Teachers at all levels want to know how to develop a classroom in which students think and think carefully and creatively about problems that concern them. Linda Andrews, a fourth to sixth grade teacher at Woodridge Elementary School in

Spokane, has shared with us her experience in empowering her students to react with thoughtful care and compassion to the Chernobyl disaster by having the students find out where in Spokane there were stockpiles of dietary iodine (none, in spite of the proximity of the Hanford nuclear reservation or Fairchild AFB) and how they could get some shipped to the children of Chernobyl. After doing the necessary spadework and surviving bureaucratic run-arounds at the state and national levels, the students were successful in sending off supplies to Chernobyl.

These examples and more are described in the "Teaching in the Future Tense" booklet that was distributed to participants at the NCSIE Conference session on "Teaching in the Future Tense." Additional copies of the booklet are available for $3.00 each from the writer or from FutureSpokane, Education Committee; East 525 Mission; Spokane WA 99202; phone (509) 484-2145.

In early November, at a meeting of interested teachers, we brainstormed the kinds of in-service programs the people present wanted to help them learn to "teach in the future tense." An in-service course, sponsored by Eastern Washington University, and taught by teachers, for teachers, is scheduled to begin Winter Quarter. We wanted to know the kinds of things elementary and secondary school teachers saw as their needs and to identify teachers we can call upon to share their expertise with us. The results were:

Rule-setting class meetings

Building a risk-taking environment

Establishing a desirable ambience at the start of the year

Problem solving processes

Self-discipline

Organizing for Student-centered and Individualized learning

Integrating subjects (elementary levels)

Different ways to evaluate student work

Clustering, or "mind-mapping"

Student government: how to make it more effective

Connecting education with city government

Fostering and validating independent thinkers among kids

Cooperative learning

Schools/Classrooms organized for choices

Building bridges between teachers; i.e. how to work with and articulate what one is doing to fellow teachers

Communicating with parents

Teaching across disciplines: multi-disciplinary studies

Teaching for Thinking

At my NCSIE Conference presentation, I summarized these ideas in a plan for an in-service program for "teaching in the future tense." The program has five parts--forming, norming, storming, performing, and termination--each part referring to a stage in the development of a class. In the "forming" stage, the concerns of the students are identified, people in the class get acquainted with each other, and the teacher begins the process of establishing the norms of the class. In the "norming" stage, the rules (i.e., norms) of the class are identified, such as cooperative learning, group work, shared decision-making power. Structured activities are used to show students how to operate in these ways. In the "storming" stage, the students learn how to

resolve conflicts and problems in win-win ways, rather than by using power or permissiveness. In the "performing" stage, the class operates the way most teachers fantasize a class could operate: a learning community in which the participants exercise responsibility and show concern for each other. When such a class nears the end of its life, the "termination" stage starts, and includes the things the teacher can do to help the students accept the impending "death" of this class and to make the transition to the next one. These stages and suggestions for structured activities for each stage were made available to participants at the "Teaching in the Future Tense" presentation. Additional copies are available from the writer.

SUMMARY

"Teaching in the Future Tense" means empowering students to envision alternative futures, and teaching them the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively toward them. Such an education works best when students can act responsibly and with initiative, when they can work together caringly and effectively, when they share decision-making power, and when they are free to investigate whatever issues and concerns might arise.

"Teaching in the future tense" is not:

(1) a preference for some teaching strategies nor the exclusion of others. Teachers know what "works" and what doesn't "work" for them in classrooms. We assume that teachers will work from their strengths.

(2) a debate on good teaching versus bad teaching. We doubt

that there are any teaching procedures that are intrinsically "good"--i.e. workable for any teacher in any situation at all times.

(3) a preference for one kind of classroom arrangement or style of school architecture over another. Although the kind and arrangement of classroom furniture can help or hinder a lesson, we know that lessons can succeed or fail despite how the room is arranged.

(4) a call for a new curriculum design. The elements of "teaching in a future tense" described above can occur in any subject at any grade level. "Teaching in the future tense" is a commitment to certain educational goals, reflecting certain philosophical beliefs, not a new subject to add to the curriculum.

"Teaching in the future tense" is a commitment to empowering students to take more control over their schooling and their futures by helping them (1) develop individual initiative and responsibility, (2) build community with their peers through developing social competence, (3) gain a sense of their own competence and effectiveness through learning to share power responsibly and wisely, and (4) learn to think speculatively about their futures and to work toward their chosen goals.

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